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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #1377/01 1130923

ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0852  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC// PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001377

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/07/2017

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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE INTERIOR MINISTRY; DIRECTOR COMPLAINS OF MARGINALIZATION, THREATS

REF: A) 06 BAGHDAD 2725 B) 06 BAGHDAD 4270 C) 06 BAGHDAD 0462 D) 06 BAGHDAD 4292

Classified By: DEPUTY POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT GILCHRIST FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ministry of Interior (MoI) Human Rights Director Mazen Kamel Al-Qoraishi (strictly protect) on March 27 complained that he receives little support within his ministry in addressing serious human rights problems in MoI detention facilities. He also reported an assassination attempt against him in January, which he said reflects the danger facing MoI's human rights officials. Mazen said he saw improvements in oversight of MoI detention facilities over the past year. Although one of the top officials in the ministry working on human rights, he was unaware that Interior Minister Bulani had on March 11 blocked the arrest of Site 4 torture suspect Major General (MG) Mahdi Sabeh Hashim. END SUMMARY.

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HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOI: LITTLE SUPPORT, BIG ISSUES  
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¶2. (C) On March 27, MoI's Human Rights IG Mazen told PolOff that in the four months he has worked as the human rights director in the office of the MoI Inspector General, he has noted very little logistical and moral support for human rights at the ministry. Mazen said one top official (whom he declined to name) told him "You are protecting terrorists' rights, not human rights" when he attempted unsuccessfully to send the minister reports on conditions within MoI detention facilities. He added that he has received no responses to his requests for equipment to help his staff perform inspections. Mazen said for example, in order to document evidence, his staff uses cameras on their own cell phones to photograph abused prisoners. Mazen said that he is now attempting to keep a database to keep track of MoI detainees on the one computer he shares with his staff of approximately ¶20.

¶3. (C) Lieutenant General (LTG) Martin Dempsey, commander of the Coalition's Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I) -- responsible for recruiting, training, and equipping the Iraqi Security Forces -- on April 21 noted that internal rivalries within MoI have led to the IG being under-resourced, while the Internal Affairs (IA) Directorate is adequately resourced.

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MOI HUMAN RIGHTS WORKERS FEAR FOR OWN SAFETY  
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¶4. (C) Mazen said that MoI's human rights staff members continue to risk their lives to perform their jobs. He

informed Poloff that in January, a neighbor alerted him to a bomb placed by the front wall of his home, which a MoI Explosive Ordnance Disposal team subsequently defused. Although the incident remained under investigation, Mazen has resorted to changing the locations he spends his evenings. Members of his staff have also told him they fear MoI police officers, who operate under the umbrella of the law yet sometimes resist allowing them to enter MoI detention facilities. He advised his staff that as a safety measure, they should arrange for different vehicles for their arrivals and departures from detention centers. Mazen confided his belief that his staff's safety concerns are justified, because some inspectors, who had visited MoI's Baghdad Central Detention facility when it was still operating, were shot in front of their homes and others received threat letters. (Note: The Baghdad Central Detention facility, also known as "Site 4," was a MoI 2nd National Police Division facility that was shut down after a U.S.-Iraqi joint inspection team uncovered abuses there in May 2006. End note.)

¶15. (C) LTG Dempsey has observed that Mazen is not the only MoI official who has survived assassination attempts; for example, the MoI's IA Director MG Ahmed Taha Mosawi has also had nine attempts on his life.

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MOI HUMAN RIGHTS DIRECTOR: INSPECTIONS BRING FEW SOLUTIONS  
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¶16. (C) Despite poor support and security concerns, Mazen reported that since the beginning of the year his staff had paid over 30 visits to Baghdad detention facilities. He personally conducted one of these inspections with Minister

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of Human Rights Wijdan Salim at the Ministry of Defense (MoD) 3rd Brigade, 6th Division detention facility in Abu Ghreib in January. Of the 456 detainees there, he noted that about half had expired arrest warrants; the other half had no arrest warrants at all. Mazen added that Minister Wijdan sent a report on the inspection, which included details on the detainees' poor health conditions, to the Council of Ministers and Prime Minister Maliki. However, Mazen did know of any concrete steps to improve the situation following the report. (Note: Since January, in coordination with Post's Rule of Law Coordinator's Office, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the GoI's Higher Juridical Council, Coalition Forces have since deployed Tiger Teams of investigative judges and judicial investigators to detention centers, including the MoD's 3rd Brigade, 6th Division facility, to reduce overcrowding. End note.)

¶17. (C) Mazen also noted overcrowding when he inspected the MoI's 2nd Division National Police detention facility in Baghdad's Khadimiya district; for example, cells with capacities for 50 people, held around 100 people. Mazen reported that the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) prisons often refused to accept convicted prisoners transported from inferior MOI facilities, citing a lack of capacity. In a separate conversation with PolOff on March 28, Deputy Minister of Justice Posho Ibrahim confirmed this fact.

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SITE 4 SUSPECT STILL EMPLOYED AT MOI  
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¶18. (C) Mazen said that he did not know that Interior Minister Bulani had on March 11, blocked the execution of an arrest warrant issued for MG Mahdi Sabeh Hashim, who was Commander of the 2nd National Police Division during the period when the alleged torture of detainees took place at the division's Site 4 detention facility (ref A). He reported that MG Mahdi -- believed to have directly ordered torture and other abuse -- is now working in MoI's intelligence division. His only punishment for his alleged crimes has been the loss of four

days of pay. Mazen said that MG Mahdi was well-known for his corruption among ministry employees. However he said, unfortunately, MG Mahdi has "high level political contacts" who protect him. Mazen added that he has never received information regarding MG Mahdi's alleged human rights violations, although he knew of the case. Despite numerous continuing problems, Mazen said that he believes there is now better oversight of MoI detention facilities than there was in 2005 and early 2006 (ref B). However, he noted that in early days a number of inspectors had been killed trying to investigate facilities and initiate oversight (ref C).

¶9. (C) LTG Dempsey notes that Minister Bulani -- through legal means -- blocked the arrest of MG Mahdi based on the advice of an internal MoI legal review that assessed there was not enough evidence to convict him in a court of law. Post notes that this legal review apparently took place after Charge pressed Bulani in November 2006 to bring into custody all officers indicted in the Site 4 case, especially MG Mahdi (ref D).

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (C) Coordination between the MoI Human Rights Director and MoHR on prisons inspections is one step towards more accountability over abuses and poor conditions in MoI detention facilities. The commitment of Mazen and his staff also provide hope for gradual improvements. Nonetheless, poor conditions and frequent reports of abuse, especially in MoI detention facilities, remain one of Iraq's most prominent human rights problems. Post will continue to press GoI officials to make very much needed improvements. END COMMENT.  
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